

THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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*"Eugenics is the science which deals with
all influences that improve the inborn
qualities of a race; also with those that
develop them to the utmost advantage."—
Sir Francis Galton, 1904.*

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

"WE need to know a great deal more about human heredity," writes Professor J. B. S. Haldane, F.R.S. With this sensible view, boldly displayed in the headlines to one of Professor Haldane's articles in the *Daily Worker*,* every eugenicist will warmly concur. But though there is much common ground between Professor Haldane and most eugenicists in the body of the article, it would be idle to pretend that there are not important points of difference too.

Professor Haldane, writing very properly with one eye to his audience, is at great pains to affirm that the mere fact of believing in the existence of inborn differences between human beings does not prove one a Fascist. Apparently, there are many among the readers of the *Daily Worker* who hold that once the reality of such differences is conceded "you justify Hitler's policy against the Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians, not to mention the numerous Germans who were murdered in the name of race hygiene."

It would be easy to dismiss all this as an

aberration of logic so silly as hardly to merit correction, possibly even too pathological to respond to it. Nevertheless, it is well to bear in mind that many of the crimes of the Nazis were in fact committed in the name of "eugenics"; and even though their brand of "eugenics" was no more like ours than their brand of "socialism" was like Professor Haldane's, the confounding of the two, for all their fundamental differences, must be regarded as inevitable and wholly deserving of serious examination. It is also worth remembering that those most given to blaming eugenics for the crimes of Nazism are in general high-minded persons who might react sympathetically to a reasoned demonstration that eugenics, far from implying Fascism, is wholly consistent with the liberal humanism which they profess as their own creed.

Even Professor Haldane himself, for all his erudition, fails in his article to distinguish between eugenics as expounded by Galton and modified by his followers in the light of advancing knowledge, and the perversion of eugenics upheld by the Nazi race theorists and those who have accepted the German philosophy of the subordination of the individual to the State. Thus, he claims that "once you make sterilization legal for one reason it is likely to be used for others, for example on people whom the Government regards as mentally or morally subnormal."

This statement is probably true of compulsory sterilization, but most certainly not of voluntary sterilization carried out under the safeguards regarded as essential by British eugenicists and incorporated in the recommendations of the Brock report. Professor Haldane may argue that from voluntary sterilization with careful safeguards to compulsory sterilization with none is but a short step; that once the principle of

sterilization is conceded the abuses follow, if not automatically, at least at the whim of any ill-disposed Government. If this is indeed his opinion, we seriously invite him to read the controversies on the subject that were published in this REVIEW during the period before and immediately after the publication of the Brock report, when sterilization was an issue prominently before the public. We need not recapitulate the case we put forward then, but in essence it was that morally and spiritually there existed an unbridgeable gulf between voluntary sterilization with safeguards and compulsory sterilization at the will of the State. The one is an added freedom, the conferment of a right which is enjoyed even now, in the absence of legal sanction, by the well-to-do but is normally denied to the poor; the other is a dangerous encroachment on the rights of the individual which this *Society* hopes and believes all freedom-loving men and women will inflexibly oppose.

Perhaps Professor Haldane will tell us what there is in common between Fascism and the right of the individual to choose whether or not he will continue to bear the heavy burden of a biologically dangerous fertility. It is true, as he points out, that mental defect is not always transmitted from parents to children, but he will hardly deny that the chances of mental defectives producing defective or backward progeny are high, and of producing children above the average very small. Nor would he deny, and indeed he admits in his article, that mentally defective parents are in general incapable of rearing their children properly. What, then, is the objection to giving adult defectives the opportunity, to take or reject as they please, of undergoing an operation which would render them infertile without making them incapable of enjoying the comforts and companionship of married life? Professor Haldane does not need to be reminded that many mental defectives, and an even higher proportion of persons liable to transmit grave physical disabilities, are deeply troubled by their potential fertility and would welcome with all their hearts the chance of being rid of it once and for all.

Even if it is admitted that the sterilization of defectives could produce very little effect on the total incidence of mental retardation, compassion alone for unhappily afflicted men and women would provide a complete and sufficient justification for the enactment of voluntary sterilization. Professor Haldane admits as much when he says: "I know that as a matter of fact people with serious hereditary diseases do abstain from parenthood to a very large extent when the facts are explained to them; and the more people understand these facts the more will this be so. In fact, education will do a very great deal to cut down the transmission of such diseases." So indeed it will, and in that conviction this *Society* has always maintained that one of its chief activities must be to create, and to co-operate with all social agencies which directly or indirectly are helping to create, a eugenic conscience in the community.

But what is the use of explaining the facts, of making people will the end, if at the same time we deny them the means? How does Professor Haldane expect those with serious hereditary diseases to avoid parenthood? By remaining celibate all their lives? By sexual abstinence within marriage? By submitting to incarceration in institutions in which they would be secure from sexual temptation? Professor Haldane is too realistic, too humane, to regard these as satisfactory solutions to a very grave problem. The wider dissemination of birth-control knowledge might help a little; but no available birth-control method confers complete security, and all experience shows that the higher the mental retardation the greater is the risk of failure. Contraception may offer a partial solution for the physically defective; for the mental defective it is no solution at all.

If Professor Haldane believed that mentally defective persons should be denied all opportunity of mixing freely with other men and women, we could understand his categorical and apparently unqualified objection to sterilization. But in fact he does not favour this brutal expedient. He says, quite rightly, that "many mental defectives are

well looked after by their families, and can do unskilled work, so that they are no great burden on the community." But if they live with their families, they may marry; and if they marry but are not sterilized they will probably have children; and if they have children the chances are that they will not, in Professor Haldane's own submission, bring them up properly. Is this a risk that he believes should be taken?

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One paragraph in the article comes strangely from one who seldom misses the chance of pointing out the profound influence of social and economic forces in the shaping of human traits. "I think," he writes, "it is far more dangerous to the community that children should be brought up with a bias towards being financiers than that they should be born with a bias towards mental defect. I am not in favour of sterilizing either defectives or financiers; but if I had to choose, it would be the financiers who would first be deprived of opportunities to reproduce."

We need not waste a moment on the question whether it is a good or a bad thing that any children "should be brought up with a bias towards being financiers." It is a question of moral values, admittedly important, and for good or ill possibly vital to the development of our civilization. But no one can believe, not even we suggest Professor Haldane himself, that it has more than the remotest bearing on the biological structure of our society. Financiers are made—often, we are given to understand, self-made—not born; mental defectives (with reservations that we need not go into, but that Professor Haldane may be assured we never fail to make) are born, not made. It is no more possible to eliminate financial ability—which usually indeed is only general ability directed to financial ends—by sterilization than to eliminate mental defectiveness by education. The child "brought up with a bias towards being a financier" could, by a mere change in environmental influences, be brought up with a bias towards being a politician, a doctor, or even, if we may say so, a geneticist. This much we feel

sure will be admitted by Professor Haldane himself. But if he also admits that a child born with a bias towards mental defect could not by any vicissitude of environment be brought up with a bias towards transmissible intelligence, what becomes of his affirmation that, as between financiers and mental defectives, it is the former who should first be deprived of opportunities to reproduce?

If the question remains unanswered we shall not be deeply disappointed. This statement of Professor Haldane's is after all the sort of thing that even the best of us might feel constrained to write in the columns of the *Daily Worker*; and in that setting we agree it goes rather well. But it would be unfair to take it literally as an argument that could be justified by a dispassionate appeal to logic and established fact. Professor Haldane may take it that we view with tolerance and sympathy those lapses from scientific objectivity that result from passionately held political convictions. Indeed, it is most comforting to feel that none of us is immune from the influence of deep emotion, not even a scientist of Professor Haldane's learning and integrity.

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His final affirmation deserves to be quoted in full:

I am definitely in favour of eugenics when two conditions are fulfilled.

One is that we should know a great deal more than we yet do about human heredity.

The other is that class distinctions should have been abolished, so that eugenics cannot be used as an excuse for persecuting people of whom the ruling class disapproves.

I am quite convinced that there are inborn differences between human beings, for example that no amount of education could have made me as musical as most of my readers. For I inherited a very "bad ear" from my mother.

I also believe that at least nine people out of ten have enough inborn ability to be really good at some useful work or other.

And I believe that these differences are determined by heredity, which does not mean necessarily handed down from parent to child.

I do not think that these beliefs make me a Fascist.

He is quite right, of course. These beliefs do not make him a Fascist; far from it.

Nevertheless, they are open to certain objections which we shall try to put very briefly.

In the first place, great as is the need for a more profound knowledge of human heredity, it by no means follows that there does not already exist sufficient knowledge to justify the immediate application of limited eugenic policies. We know something about the transmission of certain diseases and defects; and a little about the transmission and distribution of such biologically desirable qualities as intelligence. Not nearly enough, admittedly: not nearly as much as will assuredly emerge in the years to come. But to say that we must not do anything until we know everything is a form of nihilism which Professor Haldane would be the first to deprecate in other fields of social endeavour. To encourage the fertility of the better-endowed members of all classes in our society is in itself no small service to posterity; nor is the limitation of the fertility of those who by their hereditary constitution are more liable than their fellows to produce diseased or defective progeny.

Furthermore, even when it is conceded that in a stratified society, particularly one in which there are great differences in wealth and opportunity between the classes, it is not always easy to tell which are the hereditary and which the environmental determinants of human qualities, the fact remains that over a large field the problem is not insoluble, and that with respect to some characters, notably intelligence, it is possible, with a high degree of accuracy, to distinguish natural endowment from acquired skills. That eugenicists in general are not unmindful of the complexity of the task must be evident to any regular reader of these columns; but while agreeing with Professor Haldane that the problem of diagnosis is not straightforward, we must dissent from his conclusion that this is a reason for forgoing all attempt at treatment. If any ruling class attempted to use eugenics as an excuse for persecuting people of whom it disapproved, Professor Haldane would find us at his side. Can we be equally sure of his support when eugenics is used, as we believe it can be here

and now, for raising the general level of biological endowment and as far as lies in our power eliminating, however slowly, those inborn qualities that are responsible for so much human disease, defect and misery?

* * *

This is as good an opportunity as any for examining some further objections to eugenic principles and policies that were recently put forward in a letter of resignation from the *Society*. The arguments were so admirably put that in this case the best as well as the simplest course is to quote the writer's own words.

If our fears about the differential birth-rate are true, a smaller proportion of university students should nowadays be coming from the most intelligent sections of the community (whom I am going to call the professional classes, for brevity): is this so? If it is, a greater proportion must be coming from the social groups which we regard as less intelligent—labourers, artisans, small traders. Is there any evidence that children of these groups who reach the universities are, in fact, any less intelligent than the children of the professional classes? Is it not true, in fact, that a recent inquiry (the Committee on Scientific Man Power) showed that 5 per cent of the whole population display, on test, intelligence as bright as that of the better half of university students; and that on the basis of intelligence alone 80 per cent of university students ought to be drawn from children who begin their education in elementary schools, whereas only about 40 per cent actually are? I know there are good arguments to meet these points—that one must consider proportions and so on—but they seem to me to show that we are not yet using fully all the ability already available among children of the non-professional groups; and that until we have done that it is too early to start fussing about breeding less from those groups and more from others.

Some of the views here expressed are beyond reasonable dispute; but we agree that this is no reason for failing to press them home on every suitable occasion. Many indisputable facts have an odd way of being forgotten when they conflict with social prejudices and settled habits of thought; and some of those adduced by the writer are prominent among them. Thus, it is hardly open to question that we are *not*

using fully all the ability available in our society; or that among the children who begin their education in the elementary schools there are many whose educational opportunities fall lamentably short of their real capacities. But what follows from this? Does it follow that all our endeavours should be directed to the prevention of such waste of precious human resources and none at all to dealing with the special problems of the differential birth-rate? Why, it may be asked, this implication of an antithesis between two activities which should be wholly complementary to each other?

Incidentally, the writer is not quite accurate in her view that the differential birth-rate which mainly concerns eugenicists is that which exists between the various strata of our society. If this has any serious eugenic consequences, it can only be in the most extreme instances, as for example between the general body of the community on the one hand and certain elements in the social problem group on the other. The differential birth-rate that does call for examination, however, is that which may be found within rather than between the classes; in other words, that differential fertility which in any given class would result in an increase of its less intelligent at the expense of its more intelligent members.

There was no question of class distinction, for instance, in Dr. Fraser Roberts's survey of the relation between the intelligence and fertility of Bristol families. Taking the figures as a whole, the conclusion was inescapable that the least intelligent families were the most prolific; and this fact, if the Bristol figures, as seems likely, are representative of those of the country as a whole, would constitute a serious social problem however wisely society happened to use its human resources.*

While agreeing, then, with the writer that "we are not yet using fully all the ability already available among children of the non-professional groups," we cannot see how it

could ever be "too early to start fussing" about breeding from the more rather than the less intelligent groups. We have here two socially valuable activities that should go hand in hand; and it must be evident to anyone who has examined the *Eugenics Society's* statement of Aims and Objects, or who has taken the trouble to glance through these columns over the past few years, that the *Eugenics Society* is as much concerned about the one as it is about the other.

The writer's second point should also be read in her own words.

Are we right in laying so much weight on intelligence? You will feel certain we are, and so did I till I worked for six years among mental defectives; and then I began to wonder. They showed such a great variety of other virtues—generosity, goodwill, altruism, sweet temper—that I began to think a world peopled by mental defectives might be an improvement on the present one. That, of course, is an extravagance but I certainly felt that I was not willing for the families carrying such genes to be eugenized to a standstill. Since good qualities may be carried by poor stock, and since the genes are rattled in the dice-box with every new generation, is it not wise to keep the variety of mates as wide as possible, in the hope that what is of value in a poor stock may have a chance of perpetuation in a better one?

We have here a problem in human values, and it is doubtful if a whole issue of the *REVIEW* would suffice to skim its surface. All we can suggest is that this statement should be read in conjunction with the views on intelligence, and on the conservation of genes responsible for defect, set out in the symposium on "Eugenical Types" published elsewhere in these pages. We do not say that the authors of the symposium provide a complete answer to the views here set out; but they do sketch the main lines of such an answer and, at the very least, do show that the problems which perplex the writer, and to our great regret have led to her resignation, have not been wholly ignored by those who still find useful work to do in the ranks of the *Eugenics Society*.

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Dr. C. P. Blacker writes:

Professor L. S. Penrose's inaugural lecture, delivered at University College on January

* Confirmatory data will be found in Sir Cyril Burt's pamphlet on *Intelligence and Fertility* shortly to be published for the *Eugenics Society* by Hamish Hamilton Ltd.

31st, 1946, and printed in the *Lancet* of June 29th, might be compared to a peculiar kind of sandwich.

The lecture begins with some general remarks about propaganda. When Galton first proposed the word "eugenics" to describe the science of improving stock, he was, we are told, influenced by the results of breeding horses and hounds. Applied to man, the object of selective breeding would be, in Galton's words, "to give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they would otherwise have had." Professor Penrose then proceeds to make this astonishing statement: "This appears to imply that eugenics should endeavour to accelerate natural selection between races." The expression "prevailing speedily" in the above quotation from Galton is admittedly ambiguous. It might mean a process by which one race defeats, conquers, overcomes another race in a struggle, in which sense the expression might certainly denote something akin to natural selection as generally understood. On the other hand, the words might equally well denote a process similar to that by which corn replaces goosefoot, sand-spurrey or sorrel in a cultivated field.

Which of these two meanings was in Galton's mind when he wrote about eugenics? Nobody who has read his papers and books can have the slightest doubt as to the answer. All Galton's writings about eugenics are permeated with the belief that the aim of eugenics was not to "accelerate natural selection," but to replace it by something else. Numerous and diverse quotations would substantiate this view. I will confine myself to one which could not be more succinct. "Man is gifted with pity and other kindly feelings; he has also the power of preventing many kinds of suffering. I conceive it to fall well within his province to replace Natural Selection by other processes that are more merciful and not less effective. This is precisely the aim of eugenics." This passage is the penultimate paragraph of Galton's *Memories of my Life*, and was written just before his death in his eighty-ninth year.

Professor Penrose's interpretation of Galton's outlook—that eugenics should endeavour to accelerate natural selection—leads him to connect Galton's name with doctrines of race hygiene as practised in Germany. These doctrines are largely the outcome of applying to the struggle between races—a struggle wherein the master race will triumph—the principle of natural selection. Professor Penrose thus suggests to the reader that Galton's emphasis on the need for propaganda was unfortunate, and that he would not have stressed it as he did if he could have foreseen its consequences in some countries. This attack via Galton on "propaganda" is the first layer of the sandwich.

Turning from "propaganda" as from something unsavoury or evil, Professor Penrose develops the theme of his address—phenylketonuria. This is a very interesting disease, wherein a detectable chemical deviation is associated with an abnormal mental function, which Professor Penrose has done much to elucidate. Indeed, he is one of the leading authorities in the world on it. But in addition to being very interesting it is also very rare, occurring in only about one in 50,000 persons in the United Kingdom. The disease is the product of the combination of two recessive genes. But the gene is so rare (the incidence of carriers is of the order of one in 100) that any single person identified as a carrier could be safely assured that he need not worry about the risks of getting married and having children. Professor Penrose's excellent account of this interesting but socially almost negligible disease is the middle layer in the sandwich.

The third layer is formed by some further generalizations. The problem of mental health is among the most important confronting the human race. Now that we are possessed of such destructive weapons, it is more than ever important that people entrusted with power be intelligent and stable. Who will not agree? But then let us not neglect to study the inheritance of intelligence and stability. By all means let us investigate rare recessive diseases hoping that they may provide keys which may unlock doors. But do not let us avert our

eyes from subjects of more immediate import. Galton himself prepared a list of such topics which we hope will not be ignored by the Foundation which carries his name.* One of these is called "Co-operation" and calls for "the influence of eugenic

students in stimulating others." Is this what Professor Penrose would class, and stigmatize, as propaganda?

* "Studies in National Eugenics," included in the symposium *Essays in Eugenics*, by Francis Galton, 1909.

SOCIAL PROBLEM FAMILIES IN THE LIMELIGHT

By C. P. BLACKER

THE social problem group, always of interest to eugenicists, has been periodically exposed to the limelight of publicity.

Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1889), The Royal Commission on the Poor Law (1909), the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded (1912), the Mental Deficiency Committee (1930), the Brock Committee (1934), all provided phases of illumination. But this is not the place to describe the effects of these reports. Two recent events have thrown new light on the subject. The first was the war-time evacuation of children; the second was the Beveridge Report—the midwife of twins whose comprehensive growth will transform the internal structure of our society. I refer to the new Health Services and to National Insurance.

"The effect of evacuation," says the author of an important report which has had a wide influence (11) "was to flood the dark places with light and to bring home to the national consciousness that the 'submerged tenth' described by Charles Booth still exists in our towns like a hidden sore, poor, dirty, and crude in its habits, an in-

tolerable and degrading burden to decent people forced by poverty to neighbour with it. Within this group are the 'problem families,' always on the edge of pauperism and crime, riddled with mental and physical defects, in and out of the Courts for child neglect, a menace to the community, of which the gravity is out of all proportion to their numbers. It is a serious matter that no study of this class of the population exists, and if this book serves only to focus attention upon the need for one, the authors will be well satisfied."

Comprehensive medical services and comprehensive National Insurance will necessarily draw further attention to this group. Indeed, investigations of the kind demanded by the author of the report just quoted are already in evidence. Five papers by medical officers of health have been published in the last two years (1) (3) (4) (8) (9); another investigation (12) promoted by Dr. Frederick Grundy, M.O.H. of Luton, and ably carried out by Mr. Charles G. Tomlinson, senior Administrative Officer of the Public Health Department of that town, has just been published; and the Council of the *Eugenics Society* has recently awarded a sixth Darwin